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A Workforce Strategy For Alberta's Forest Industry

Building and Educating Tomorrow's Workforce

Alberta's 10 Year Strategy

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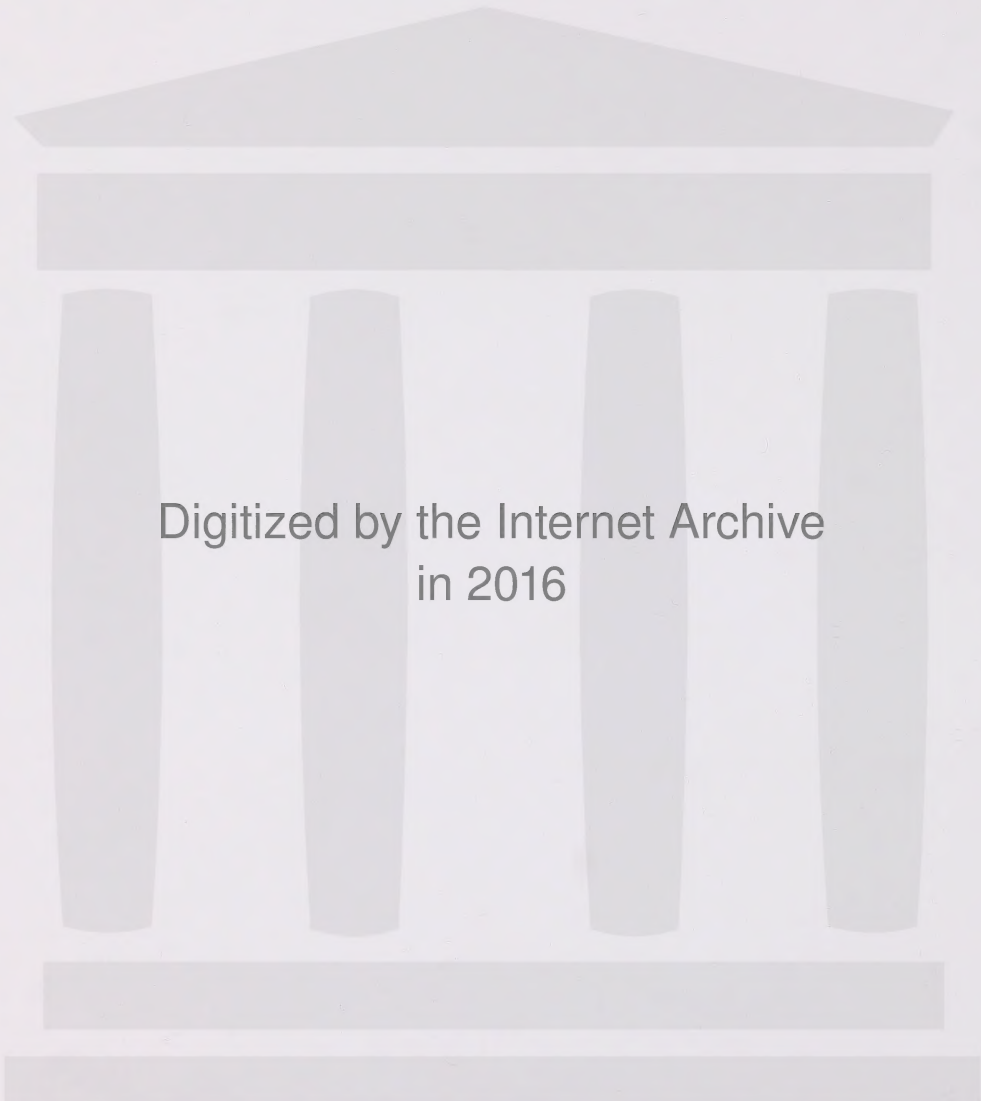
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FOREWORD

A Workforce Strategy for Alberta's Forest Industry was developed by stakeholders from the forest industry with support from the Alberta government. Representatives from this industry participated in a series of discussions that occurred between 2007 and early 2008 and the feedback from those meetings formed this strategy. The Alberta Forest Products Association and the Resource Industry Suppliers Association played key leadership roles in bringing stakeholders together to participate in the discussions. Industry associations have identified actions they support and to which they will contribute with related projects/initiatives. The following organizations contributed to the development of this workforce strategy:

- Alberta Forest Products Association
- Alberta Pacific Forest Industries Inc.
- Alberta Spruce Industries Ltd.
- Canadian Forest Products Ltd. (CANFOR)
- College of Alberta Professional Foresters
- College of Alberta Professional Forest Technologists
- Department of Renewable Resources, University of Alberta
- Manning Diversified Forest Products Ltd.
- Millar Western Forest Products Ltd.
- Palliser Lumber Sales Ltd.
- Resource Industry Suppliers Association
  (formerly Forest Industry Suppliers and Logging Association)
- United Steelworkers, Local 1-207
- Vanderwell Contractors Ltd.
- West Fraser Mills Ltd.
- Weyerhaeuser
- Woodland Operations Learning Foundation

BACKGROUND

Alberta is a leader in economic growth in Canada and the world. However, Alberta is faced with labour and skill shortages which, if not addressed, will limit our province's continued economic growth and prosperity.

Building and Educating Tomorrow's Workforce (BETW) is Alberta's 10-year labour force development strategy. This strategy identifies 17 government-led priority actions to ensure Alberta has more workers, better-trained people and innovative workplaces. These government actions address labour force issues across several industry sectors. Lead government ministries are identified for each priority action.

Meeting Alberta's labour force challenges over the next decade requires the participation and involvement of all stakeholders. Strong collaboration and partnerships between government and stakeholder groups are key to the successful implementation of this strategy. Stakeholders include industry, labour groups, professional organizations, volunteer and community agencies, education and training providers, Aboriginal groups and where appropriate, other orders of government. Each stakeholder has an important role to play. Industry sectors will need their own actions and initiatives to address their unique economic pressures and challenges.

INDUSTRY WORKFORCE STRATEGIES

While there are common labour force pressures across industry sectors in Alberta, some industries are feeling certain pressures more acutely than others. Actions are needed to address the unique labour force issues and challenges of each industry sector.

Industry stakeholders are working with the Alberta government to document existing initiatives and develop industry-specific workforce development strategies. These workforce strategies provide industry associations and individual employers with a framework of sector-led actions to build the labour force needed to support continued growth over the next 10 years. The forest industry is currently experiencing an economic crisis precipitated by the crash of the United States' housing market and a subsequent crash in lumber prices, the high Canadian dollar, the Softwood Lumber Tax, rising labour and energy costs in the Alberta boom and, impacts of the mountain pine beetle infestation. Given the cyclical nature of the markets and the current industry restructuring, conditions will eventually turn favourable. As circumstances and priorities shift, the forest industry is expected to revisit this workforce strategy to ensure its relevancy.

Industry is leading the implementation of workforce strategy actions. High levels of co-operation and collaboration within Alberta's forest sector are required for successful implementation of the workforce strategy. Creative solutions and a synergistic approach emerge when stakeholders come together in partnership to implement initiatives. Government assists in bringing stakeholders together, including those from other sectors, to work on common actions and initiatives.

Albertans are the long-term beneficiaries of this important collaboration to build Alberta's workforce during the next decade.

PROFILE OF ALBERTA'S FOREST INDUSTRY

Industry Definition

The forest industry in Alberta consists of approximately 150 companies providing a variety of goods and services to primary forest and wood product manufacturers.[1] In addition, Alberta's forest industry includes over 2,300 logging and log hauling contractors and forest supply and service providers.[2] There are five general sectors within Alberta's forest industry:

- **Primary sector** – Companies that take a raw wood resource and produce a product through a primary breakdown manufacturing process. Product examples include logs, cants, pulp, newsprint, lumber, oriented strand board, plywood and fibreboard.

- **Secondary/re-manufacturing sector** – Companies that re-manufacture primary wood products into secondary products. Product examples include door and window components, boards, decking, boxes, crates, pallets, trusses, pressure treated lumbers and other engineered building components (I-beams, finger-jointed lumber, I-joists, archribs and laminated lumbers).

- **Tertiary sector** – Companies that manufacture architectural millwork and fine building products, which entail wood and often other composite materials. Product examples include moulding, furniture, cabinetry and specialty products.

- **Harvest/reforestation sector** – Companies that harvest (and perform log hauling) and reforest tracts of forest or timberlands contracted and sustainably managed by the government or forest tenure holders, guided by Forest Management Agreements and quotas.

- **Supply and service sector** – Companies that provide goods and services to all forest industry sectors. Examples include welding, fabrication, geomatics, engineering, software, forestry consulting, heavy equipment, processing equipment, chemicals, research and development, electrical, instrumentation, gears, bearings, blades, generators and piping.

A Workforce Strategy for Alberta's Forest Industry will address the primary, secondary and harvest/reforestation sectors. Workforce challenges within the tertiary forest industry sector have already been identified under *A Workforce Strategy for Alberta's Manufacturing Industry.* Workforce challenges with respect to the forest supply and service sectors have been identified under other workforce strategies as well as the Resource Industry Suppliers Association Workforce Action Plan.[3]

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[1] *Canadian Forestry Business Directory,* The Forest Industry Suppliers and Logging Association, 2007

[2] *Based on WCB 3100 code and RISA statistics*

[3] *RISA Workforce Action Plan 2008-09,* Resource Industry Suppliers Association, 2008

Importance to the Provincial Economy

Forestry has been a cornerstone of the provincial economy since the settlers used local trees to build shelters. The forest products industry is one of the four pillars of the Alberta economy, along with oil and gas, agriculture and tourism. This industry generates approximately $8 billion in revenue and is the province's third largest manufacturing sector.[4]

With shipments in the range of $5.1 billion in 2006, forestry is a primary industry in 50 Alberta communities with 12 Alberta communities considered forest-dependent.[5] As such, forestry plays a vital role in rural Alberta's contribution to the provincial economy. It enables Albertans to build their futures in rural communities, which is a key focus of Alberta's Rural Development Strategy.[6] In 2004, the sector contributed $17.66 Real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per hour worked or $42,836 Real GDP per worker.[7] In 2006, the sector contributed $11.2 billion to the province's GDP through direct and indirect jobs.[8]

Forestry features prominently in the provincial landscape, covering nearly 60 per cent of the provincial land mass.[9] Alberta's primary forest industry manages and contracts the harvest of approximately 24.5 million cubic meters of provincial forest lands.[10] To a lesser degree, primary and secondary forest products are manufactured from forestlands derived from First Nation lands, Métis settlements, municipal lands, public settlement lands and private lands.

Forested lands are a renewable natural resource that are managed to provide an abundance of quality products on a sustainable basis. Less than one per cent of forested lands available for harvest are harvested in any one year. The products from this harvest find their way to markets in the United States, Europe and the Asia-Pacific region.

Beyond valuable commodities, the forest sector provides an essential service to the province and its people in preserving and sustaining Alberta's forests. As part of industry's commitment to environmentally responsible forest management, four trees are regenerated for every one harvested. Each year, 82 million spruce, pine and fir seedlings are planted. Under Forest Management Agreements, forest companies are granted the rights to grow, harvest and remove timber in a certain area over a 20-year period under set quotas and with options for renewal. In return, the company takes on greater responsibility and accountability for forest management planning. This is consistent with the Alberta government's commitment to sustainable resource development.

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[4] *Growing Alberta Fact Sheet,* Alberta Forest Products Association, April 2005

[5] *Alberta Communities that Rely on the Forest Industry,* Alberta Forest Products Association, KPMG and Canadian Forest Service, 1999

[6] *A Place to Grow – Alberta's Rural Development Strategy,* Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, February 2005

[7] *Forestry and Logging with Support Activities,* Alberta Human Resources and Employment, revised 2006

[8] *Forest Industry Performance and Outlook,* Presentation to the Economics Society of Northern Alberta, by Dan Wilkinson, Alberta Sustainable Resource Development, December 7, 2007

[9] *Economic Impact of the Alberta Forest Industry,* Alberta Forest Products Association and Alberta Sustainable Resource Development, July 2005

[10] *Forest Industry Performance and Outlook,* Presentation to the Economics Society of Northern Alberta by Dan Wilkinson, Alberta Sustainable Resource Development, December 7, 2007

Employment

Using the industry definition that includes all five sub-sectors, the forest industry employs almost 54,000 Albertans with an additional 15,000 individuals in supplier and service provider jobs indirectly related to the forest product industry.[11] In contrast, Statistics Canada uses the American Industry Classification system which refers only to the primary and harvest/reforestation sub-sectors in defining the forest industry. This represents approximately 0.2 per cent of working Albertans – equivalent to 4,100 people in 2007. However, this categorization reflects a small sub-set of the forest industry employment, and excludes significant forest employment in mills, government and emerging technology areas.

The primary and harvest/reforestation sectors of the industry have occupations with varying educational and skill requirements. Foresters, for example, require a four-year bachelor's degree; technicians and technologists must graduate from a one- to two-year certificate program while logging/forest equipment operators have less formal educational requirements.

There is also a broad span of occupations and skilled trades in the industry where workers are employed as labourers, heavy equipment operators, truck drivers, sawmill machine operators, pulpmill operators, shipper/receivers, electricians, millwrights and power engineers, to name a few. These workers are employed in more than 550 wood manufacturing companies located in 95 communities throughout Alberta.[12] The majority of companies are small independent operations, often family-run, located in northern, rural and often remote parts of the province.

Demographic information is not available for the forest industry as a whole, so the following data is based on the Statistics Canada primary and harvest/reforestation sub-sector definition (Forestry and Logging with Support Activities) unless otherwise stated.

A large majority of workers in the industry are male (78 per cent) – considerably higher than the provincial average of 55 per cent.[13] Eighty-two per cent of the workforce falls within the major working age category of 25 to 54 years, which is again considerably higher than the provincial average of 55 per cent. The average age of a logging contractor in Alberta, for example, is 53.[14] Concern exists that fewer young workers entering the forest industry will mean limited opportunities for older workers to transfer their skills and knowledge to the next generation of workers.

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[11] *Growing Alberta Fact Sheet,* Alberta Forest Products Association, April 2005

[12] *Alberta Forest Products Value Added Manufacturing Industry Benchmark Study,* PricewaterhouseCoopers, December 2003

[13] *Labour Force Survey Historical Review,* Statistics Canada, 2007

[14] *FISLA Membership Survey,* The Forest Industry Suppliers and Logging Association, 2006

In 2005, labourers in forestry received an average hourly starting wage of $18.27, with an overall average salary of $41,422. Supervisors in the industry started at an annual income in the range of $64,000, which equates to an hourly rate of $26.12 for comparison across economic sectors.[15] While these wages are higher than the average across all Alberta industries, they are lower than in the oil and gas sector, the industry's chief competitor for workers, especially in more isolated parts of the province.

Alberta's mills are relatively modern and efficient, with nearly all mills having been built or significantly upgraded since 1990. Roughly 90 per cent of total lumber output is produced by 19 mills.[16] In response to competitive pressures, firms continue to streamline operations and some mills are being closed. This consolidation in the industry impacts mill workers who are being deployed to other mills and contractors/ woodland jobs. Instability and insecurity of employment in these industry sub-sectors are expected until the sector emerges from this period of consolidation and rationalization.

OUTLOOK

Alberta's forest industry will continue to benefit from expanding global markets. However, as the industry is export-focused and based on a commodity market, it faces certain challenges in the wake of declining commodity prices, such as the rising Canadian dollar, rising costs for labour, transportation and energy, and increasing competition from offshore markets. Currently, the industry is described as being in crisis with several recent mill closures and commodity prices being lower than production costs. Also looming is the mountain pine beetle infestation, which is described as a crisis of unprecedented proportions in the forest industry. While Alberta's forest industry has responded with amended harvest plans, increased planning and manufacturing, this difficult situation will be exacerbated with a glut of excess beetle-threatened wood.

The industry is not predicted to grow in the near term, with the annual employment growth outlook for 2006-2011 set at -0.4 per cent.[17] Not surprisingly, Alberta's Occupational Demand and Supply Outlook forecasts that logging machinery operators and forest workers will be displaced for the 2007-2012 period.[18]

When British Columbia can no longer salvage mountain pine beetle-killed wood, the amount of harvest in British Columbia will drop, followed by another predicted drop when the Annual Allowable Cut is recalculated for post mountain pine beetle wood flows. The reduction in North American wood supply is likely to happen just as the United States housing inventory clears up and the risk-averse mortgage industry starts to heal. It is likely that within three years markets will be strong to very strong for solid wood and panel products.

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[15] *2005 Alberta Wage and Salary Survey,* Alberta Human Resources and Employment, 2006
[16] Alberta Sustainable Resource Development and PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2005
[17] *Alberta Modified Canadian Occupational Projection System Outlook, 2006-2011,* Alberta Employment and Immigration, 2007
[18] *Alberta Occupational Demand Outlook 2007,* Alberta Employment and Immigration, 2008

Despite the low employment growth rate, there are specific skill shortages within the industry – chiefly truck drivers, skilled trades, power engineers and, as the baby boomers start to retire, supervisors. Skills shortages are also predicted in different regions of the province where forestry competes with a thriving energy sector for a limited local labour supply.

Growth opportunities within the industry's labour force will likely be guided by growth opportunities for the industry. Emerging technology in areas of information systems, harvesting, geographic information systems (GIS) and computer modelling will mean more work for people with these areas of expertise. Research in bio-products (including biomass technology, biopharmaceuticals and bio-fuels) and partnerships with sectors in agriculture, chemicals and energy may yield promising new products and processes for the forest sector and new jobs in operations, research and development. The forest industry may be challenged to fill these high-skilled jobs, since the level of workforce educational attainment and skill requirements will be significantly increased. Historically, innovation and capital investment have been the major drivers of productivity growth in the forest industry. As the economy shifts towards being knowledge-based, human capital will increasingly be a source of competitive advantage for the forest industry.

The challenge will also be to develop educational programs for these emerging occupations. Due to perceived uncertainty of occupational needs, post-secondary institutions have reported declining enrolments in forestry programs. Therefore, it will be important for the forest industry to work with post-secondary institutions to develop new programs for these emerging occupations, based on the limited information regarding future needs.

CHALLENGES AND ISSUES

Alberta's forest industry is facing a number of challenges having direct or indirect implications for the labour force, including:

- **Shortage of skilled labourers and tradespeople.** Alberta's forest industry finds itself competing directly with the oil and gas industry in many regions of the province for semi-skilled and skilled labourers and tradespeople for jobs that range from entry-level labourers to highly-skilled machine operators and forest professionals. This challenge will only increase with further development of the oil sands and heavy oil industry. Without the profit margins to be able to compete with going rates in the energy industry, companies are seeing increasing levels of turnover and many have to run shorthanded. This in turn results in increased overtime and costs. Current production slowdowns and closures are creating an environment where skilled forest workers are seeking other opportunities and threatening the ability of forest products mills to re-start.

- **Shortage of available affordable housing.** The shortage of housing in several Alberta communities contributes to the challenge of recruiting and retaining workers. In these communities, wages need to be higher in order to meet housing costs and other basic living needs.

- **Rising costs.** Inflationary pressures due to the booming economy are not just limited to labour costs. Companies in the forest industry are facing rising costs for fuel, transportation, electricity and energy. The 2006 settlement of the softwood lumber dispute, while providing more certainty regarding access to the United States market, has introduced more costs for the industry in the form of an export tax for shipments when markets are poor. The export tax is set on a sliding scale ranging from zero to 22 per cent depending on factors such as the level of Alberta exports and profitability.[19] These factors have a direct impact on the bottom line, limiting a company's ability to pay a competitive wage and remain profitable.

- **Price pressures.** A sustained downturn in the North American housing market and a global surplus of softwood lumber are exerting downward pressure on what forest companies can charge for their products. At the same time, the Canadian dollar has hit a 35-year high. In an industry where more than 50 per cent of its lumber shipments go to export markets, the rise in the Canadian dollar means Alberta wood products have become more expensive and are therefore less competitive in a global market. The percentage of pulp and paper exports are significantly higher and therefore more exposed to the currency risk. This increases the likelihood of mill closures, limiting employment prospects and job security in the industry and making it a real challenge to attract and retain workers.

- **Increased global competition.** The global marketplace is both a good-news and a bad-news story for the forest industry. The good news focuses on expanding markets for forest products, while the bad news is increased competition from offshore markets. This is especially true in the southern hemisphere where companies have significant advantages such as short growing cycles and low wage costs. A 2006 survey by PricewaterhouseCoopers rated Canada's return on capital investment as the lowest among the world's forest industries, only a two per cent return on capital employed (ROCE). This is less than half of Canada's ROCE for 2005 and far behind the global leader (Latin America) at 9.3 per cent.[20] The implication for the labour force is the need to ramp up productivity; embrace new technologies and process efficiencies in order to remain competitive. This in turn raises the bar for skill requirements and training.

- **Lower skill and educational levels.** In comparison to other industries, the forest sector has a relatively larger proportion of low-skilled jobs and workers with low levels of education. In 2001, 60 per cent of workers in the national forest sector listed high school as their highest level of educational attainment, compared to an average of 47 per cent across all industries.[21] In forestry, as in many sectors, the number of low-skilled jobs is predicted to decrease while the demand for workers with post-secondary education, skilled trades, computer skills or sales and marketing knowledge will increase. If this trend continues, a labour market imbalance may result.

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[19] *Softwood Lumber Agreement between the Government of Canada and the Government of the United States of America – 2006,* Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada, http://www.international.gc.ca/eicb/softwood/SLA-main-en.asp#legal, 2006

[20] *Growth* Global Forest, Paper and Packaging Industry Survey, 2007 Edition – Survey of 2006 Results,* PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2007

[21] *Skill Shortages in Canada's Forest Sector,* Farah Huq, Industry and Trade Division, Policy, Economics and Industry Branch, Canadian Forest Service, Natural Resources Canada, January 2007

- **Declining enrolments in forestry programs.** Enrolments in Canadian forestry schools and colleges have declined dramatically in recent years despite strong demand for graduates of these programs. This trend has been linked to negative and unfounded perceptions of the industry as a low-technology sector with limited career opportunities.[22] The decline or closure of these programs threatens the human resource capacity of the forest industry.

- **Increased consolidation and rationalization.** In a global marketplace many of the small and medium-sized operations are increasingly vulnerable and lack the economies of scale to effectively compete with "mega-mills" more common in British Columbia and the United States. There is evidence that an increasing number of small independent operators, who play an important role in creating employment in smaller Alberta communities, are losing the battle. Between 2002 and January 2006, five lumber mills closed in Alberta resulting in the loss of 450 jobs.[23] In 2007 and 2008, several Alberta forest operations announced curtailments, production slowdowns and postponements of new facility construction and/or plant closures. Consolidation of smaller contractors into single, larger operations is a concern especially for logging/field service supply workers who may find themselves displaced as a result. These workers may need assistance and retraining to adapt to working in bigger companies.

- **Increasing urbanization.** More and more young people are leaving rural communities to live in urban centres, often seeking more stable and secure employment. Many who may have initially gone to take post-secondary education opt to stay in those centres following graduation. The result is that rural communities, long a source of labour for the forest industry, are being drained of their young workforce.

- **Aging workforce.** Like many other sectors, the forest sector is starting to see the effects of an aging workforce, with 41 per cent of the Canadian forest sector workforce over the age of 45.[24] In the next decade, many forest-specific occupations will experience significantly higher than average retirement rates. As older workers retire, their years of knowledge and expertise go with them, and the industry will face a shortage of senior personnel and supervisors. Succession management and assisting high potential employees to take on these positions of responsibility will be important.

- **Seasonal work.** The forest industry has a seasonal cyclical employment pattern. The need for workers in the harvest sub-sector increases greatly between the months of October and November. Employment continues strong until spring break-up when reforestation efforts take over and continue to the end of summer. Attracting and retaining good workers during these seasonal peaks and valleys is a challenge for the industry. Competition for seasonal workers will only increase with planned development in the oil sands and the heavy oil industry.

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[22] *The Crisis in Post-Secondary Enrolments in Forestry Programs: A Call to Action for Canada's Future Forestry Professional/Technical Workforce.,* Canada's Post-Secondary Forestry Schools and the Canadian Institute of Forestry; published in The Forestry Chronicle - January/February 2006

[23] *Axe hangs over the forest industry,* The Edmonton Journal, January 28, 2006

[24] *Skill Shortages in Canada's Forest Sector,* Farah Huq, Industry and Trade Division, Policy, Economics and Industry Branch, Canadian Forest Service, Natural Resources Canada, January 2007

- **Hard-to-recruit locations.** Much of the work in the forest industry is found in northern and remote communities of the province, where there is a limited labour force. Recruiting workers to these locations can be difficult because of limited urban amenities, limited options for spousal employment and/or a high cost of living.

- **Challenging working conditions.** The nature of work in this industry is often physically demanding and seasonal with shift work and long hours, especially in cases where companies are short-staffed. Attracting and retaining workers in these conditions, especially younger workers who place a high value on work-life balance, can be challenging.

- **Lack of awareness/understanding of the forest industry.** In an age of increasing concern for the environment, there are misconceptions and a lack of understanding about the forest industry. This may deter young people and others entering the job market from considering a career in this industry. For example, an urban perception is that forestry is a sunset industry, "low tech" and low paying. In reality, the forest industry is a renewable one, environmentally conscious and heavily invested in sustainable and effective forest management practices. The industry is also increasingly high tech as more complex equipment and information systems are implemented to remain competitive in global markets.

- **Concentration of Aboriginal workers in lower-skill occupations.** While the forest sector hires a proportionately higher number of Aboriginal workers than other industries, the majority of these workers are employed in low-skilled, part-time and seasonal positions. Without further education and skills development, these workers may be displaced if the trend toward high-skill jobs continues.

INDUSTRY PRIORITY ACTIONS

Industry and labour groups are best positioned to implement priority actions to address the labour force issues and challenges experienced by the forest industry. Industry over the next ten years will take lead responsibility for implementing the strategy's priority actions. Government will enable and support contributing organizations with the implementation wherever appropriate.

A number of organizations within the forest industry have indicated their willingness to contribute to implementing one or more priority actions with supporting projects and initiatives. These contributing organizations working with their industry stakeholders will determine the order of implementing the individual actions, based on importance, over the next ten years. Contributing organizations will periodically review and revise this workforce strategy to ensure strategy actions are aligned and are relevant with changes occurring in the forest sector and external environment.

The contributing organizations which will undertake specific priority actions include:

- Alberta Forest Products Association (AFPA)
- College of Alberta Professional Foresters (CAPF)
- College of Alberta Professional Forest Technologists (CAPFT)
- Resource Industry Suppliers Association (RISA)
- Weyerhaeuser
- Woodland Operations Learning Foundation (WOLF)

INFORM

Information sharing will play a vital role in addressing labour force pressures in Alberta's forest industry. The Inform theme focuses on increased access to information to support informed decision-making on the part of employers, workers, youth entering the workforce and individuals considering employment in this industry.

1.1 Support communication initiatives (e.g. www.yourforest.org forestry information website) to improve awareness and understanding of the forest industry in terms of challenges, contributions to society, career opportunities, achievements, competitive advantages, etc.

AFPA, RISA, Weyerhaeuser

1.2 Support a human resource recruitment campaign communicating the strengths of the forest industry (e.g. high tech, green, community-based, sustainable industry) and creating a brand that differentiates the industry from the energy sector. This will be designed as a recruitment tool/ package for employers in the industry.

AFPA, Weyerhaeuser

1.3 Explore initiatives to encourage students to pursue employment opportunities within the industry. This may include the following initiatives:

- Assess high school and post-secondary students' interests and opinions on careers in the forest industry to derive insight into career attraction approaches for the industry, utilizing tools such as surveys.
- Encourage participation of high school students in the forest industry by developing and implementing targeted marketing campaigns and promoting existing educational tools aimed at high school students, their parents, teachers and school counsellors. Examples of organizations involved in these initiatives include Inside Education, Canadian Forest Services and Boreal Forest Research Institute.
- Promote/encourage students and employers to participate in work experience programs and registered apprenticeship programs in the forest industry to gain exposure and become familiar with the nature of work in the industry and ultimately consider careers in the forest industry. Examples include high school vocational training, post-secondary co-op placements, internships, and summer junior forest warden and ranger programs.

CAPF, CAPFT, RISA, Weyerhaeuser

1.4 Promote and share industry best practices about worker attraction, development and retention among firms within Alberta's forest industry. This may include:

- Development of a one-stop inventory/repository of (links to) industry information.
- Forums to identify, communicate and leverage best practices and lessons learned in other jurisdictions supporting workforce development.

AFPA, RISA, WOLF

1.5 Continue to explore, investigate and promote workforce attraction strategies such as recruitment/retention incentives, student bursaries and student job guarantees to forest industry employers.

RISA, Weyerhaeuser

1.6 Advocate with government to expand resources and create a resource database available to forest industry employers to support activities related to the attraction and retention of immigrants, temporary foreign workers and inter-provincial migrants.

AFPA

1.7 Support recruitment strategies to promote employment targeted to specific employee groups and strategies addressing the seasonal nature of the industry. Potential groups to target for seasonal work are members of the farming community and multi-sector contractors.

AFPA

ATTRACT

This theme relates to attracting workers from within and outside Alberta and Canada to meet some of the demand for labour in Alberta's forest industry.

2.1 Advocate for standardization of trade certificates and improved processes to support credential and competency recognition for out-of-province and out-of-country trade workers (e.g. millwrights and welders) seeking employment in the forest industry.

AFPA, Weyerhaeuser

2.2 Support the promotion of Alberta as a 'destination of choice' for inter-provincial migrants for the development of Alberta's forest industry.

AFPA, RISA

2.3 Advocate for expansion of the Alberta Immigrant Nominee Program (formerly called the Provincial Nominee Program) to increase the number of nominees in both the skilled and unskilled categories (e.g. National Occupation Classification Levels C and D and occupations that require at most a high-school diploma or job-specific training) and facilitate conversion of existing temporary foreign workers to landed immigrant status.

AFPA, RISA

2.4 Advocate for the streamlining of processes and changes to the Temporary Foreign Worker program to better meet the needs of the forest industry (e.g. expansion of the two-year limit and improved processing time).

AFPA, RISA

2.5 Advocate to government for a foreign credential assessment system to evaluate foreign professional training and experience.

AFPA, CAPF, CAPFT, Weyerhaeuser

2.6 Contribute to changes in labour mobility policies and act on relevant committees (provincial, national and international) to support inter-provincial and out-of-country migration of skilled workers to work in the forest industry.

AFPA, CAPF, CAPFT, RISA, Weyerhaeuser

2.7 Support the attraction of potential workers from other provinces by specifically targeting out-of-province friends/family of existing employees and parallel communities going through a mill slowdown or closure.

AFPA

DEVELOP A HIGH PERFORMANCE WORKFORCE

This theme has two components. The first focuses on building the capacity of Alberta's forest workforce to support a transition to a more value-added and knowledge-based economy.

3.1 Encourage more vocational training opportunities in high schools and post-secondary/technical institutions to promote and facilitate the development of skills for the existing and future forest workforce.

AFPA, Weyerhaeuser

3.2 Support initiatives to upgrade the skills and knowledge of people employed in Alberta's forest industry.

AFPA, CAPF, CAPFT, RISA, WOLF

3.3 Collaborate with post-secondary institutions to consider revisions to the forestry professional programs to increase its attraction to students and better represent the future of the occupation. Options might include changing the name or focus of the career from forester to "resource expert" and revising the curriculum to focus on forest management and environmental issues.

AFPA, CAPF, CAPFT

3.4 Develop a Career and Technology Studies curriculum relevant to today's forest industry.

WOLF

3.5 Support initiatives to survey and analyze training or re-training needs within the harvest reforestation sector to ensure workers' skills and education meet industry requirements.

AFPA, WOLF

3.6 Work with educational institutions to increase access to forest-related training programs in the regions/ communities where forest employers are located to encourage local youth completing these programs to stay in these communities. This may include distance education (e.g. NAIT's Forest Technology program).

AFPA, WOLF

3.7 Develop a strategy to strengthen human resource management practices throughout the forest industry and strive to be an employer of choice:

- support initiatives that can assist companies to assess the effectiveness of their human resource practices and take necessary steps to address deficiencies;
- encourage and promote the importance of developing management supervisor skills (e.g. soft skills needed to improve workforce attraction and retention); and
- promote effective practices for integrating mature workers, immigrants, persons with disabilities, Aboriginals, etc. into workplaces.

AFPA, RISA

3.8 Encourage and equip companies to implement effective employee development programs aimed at cross-training and development of transferable skills.

AFPA, RISA

3.9 Support regional approaches to addressing needs and goals shared by forest employers within a specific geographic region.

AFPA

DEVELOP A HIGH PERFORMANCE WORK ENVIRONMENT

The second component of the Develop theme relates to developing high performance work environments in Alberta's forest industry. Examples include improving workplaces and work arrangements, increasing adoption of capital investment and technology and improving business processes.

3.10 Play a greater advocacy role to raise the profile and understanding of the forest industry and its issues to government.

AFPA

3.11 Advocate to all levels of government (municipal, provincial and federal) for revision to the business tax structure and other incentives for capital investment to support the adoption of productivity enhancing technology in the forest industry (secondary wood products sector).

RISA

3.12 Continue to strengthen linkages between industry and research institutions by working with the Alberta Forest Research Institute (AFRI) to support the identification, development and application of new technologies and research opportunities relating to Alberta's forest industry.

AFPA

3.13 Promote the adoption of Lean enterprise principles and practices to improve efficiency and enhance the work environment.

RISA

RETAIN

This theme relates to enhancing the attractiveness of working in Alberta's forest industry so that workers – including mature workers, immigrants, Aboriginals and those who may experience difficulty maintaining employment – continue to work in the industry.

4.1 Work with government to retain employees in the industry and community through programs and activities, (e.g. access to short-term training, apprenticeship linkages, work sharing programs and career and employment transition assistance). These actions are prompted by temporary layoff situations which have resulted from short-term production shut-downs or shift curtailments.

AFPA

4.2 Encourage the application of effective practices to help employers improve the retention of a more diverse labour force (e.g. mature workers, Aboriginals, immigrants, women and under-employed Albertans).

AFPA, Weyerhaeuser

4.3 Promote employment in the forest industry to under-represented groups, including immigrants, Aboriginals, persons with disabilities, semi-retired people, women with children at home and students.

AFPA, Weyerhaeuser

4.4 Support strategies to attract, enable and retain Aboriginals to work in the forest industry (e.g. advanced training, targeted job shadowing, promotion of the First Nations Forestry Program and the Aboriginal Junior Forest Ranger Program).

AFPA, RISA, Weyerhaeuser

4.5 Encourage employers to implement human resource practices encouraging mature workers to maintain employment (e.g. offer part-time or flexible work arrangements, involve mature workers in mentoring and training, etc.) to ensure retention of technical and corporate knowledge in Alberta's forest industry.

AFPA

MOVING FORWARD

Industry contributors will work with their members to validate the actions found in this strategy. Based on feedback, they will select the concrete actions with the greatest and most immediate impact. The Alberta government will work with the industry contributors in a facilitating and enabling role. This includes identifying situations where it is more effective and efficient to collaborate – within and across sector industries – on similar projects. Government will facilitate these opportunities, keep abreast of emerging issues and take further action as required.

In implementing the workforce strategy, the industry contributors will:

- obtain the active involvement of industry members and other stakeholders;
- work with stakeholders (i.e. associations and labour groups) within and across industries;
- eliminate fragmentation and duplication of initiatives within and across industries;
- select the actions and initiatives with the greatest immediate impact;
- identify gaps in the priority actions in order to address both current and evolving needs; and
- ensure sustainability of the strategy over the long term.

Industry will work with government to monitor the success of this strategy over the next ten years. Industry contributors are asked to report on their progress by sharing achievements and best practices. By working together, industry and government can continue to build a strong and prosperous Alberta where all industries will benefit.

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